

John J. Ohala, "Hermann Grassmann: his contributions to historical linguistics and speech acoustics". Pp. 345-352 in H.-J. Petsche (ed.), Hermann Graßmann. From past to future: Graßmann's work in context. Proceedings of the Graßmann bicentennial conference, Potsdam, Germany, and Szczecin, Poland, September 16–19, 2009. Basel: Birkhäuser, 2011

Høyrup, Jens

Published in:
Zentralblatt MATH

Publication date:
2012

Document Version
Early version, also known as pre-print

Citation for published version (APA):
Høyrup, J. (2012). John J. Ohala, "Hermann Grassmann: his contributions to historical linguistics and speech acoustics". Pp. 345-352 in H.-J. Petsche (ed.), Hermann Graßmann. From past to future: Graßmann's work in context. Proceedings of the Graßmann bicentennial conference, Potsdam, Germany, and Szczecin, Poland, September 16–19, 2009. Basel: Birkhäuser, 2011. *Zentralblatt MATH*, (Zbl 1232.01011).

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain.
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal.

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact rucforsk@kb.dk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Zbl 1232.01011

Ohala, John J.

Hermann Grassmann: his contributions to historical linguistics and speech acoustics. (English)

Petsche, Hans-Joachim (ed.) et al., Hermann Graßmann. From past to future: Graßmann's work in context. Proceedings of the Graßmann bicentennial conference, Potsdam, Germany and Szczecin, Poland, September 16–19, 2009. Basel: Birkhäuser. 345-352 (2011). ISBN 978-3-0346-0404-8/hbk

http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-0346-0405-5_30

Graßmann is best known among mathematicians for his Ausdehnungslehre. As is already clear from the biography in the Dictionary of Scientific Biography XV, however, and still more from the complete conference volume within which Ohala's article belongs, he was not only interested in many fields beyond mathematics: he also made important contributions to several of them - not least to linguistics, which is indeed the topic of no less than four articles in the volume.

Three of these concentrate on his work as a Sanskritist and its repercussions. Ohala offers a brief sketch of his broader work, on one hand within comparative linguistics, on the other within physical phonetics.

Within the former domain, his explanation of some of the apparent exceptions to the Rask-Grimm sound shift laws from phonetic context ("Graßmann's law", about dissimilation of double aspiration) and his arguments that Sanskrit cannot be the mother tongue of the Indo-European family but must be one of many descendants of a proto-Indo-European language show him to be one of those who prepared the way for both the Junggrammatiker and for Ferdinand de Saussure (whose writings are indeed regularly in dialogue with Graßmann). Within the latter, he anticipated (by purely auditory means) Helmholtz' experimentally based analysis of the composition of vowel sounds from harmonic overtones - Ohala offers an almost page-long translation of a passage of Graßmann's 1854 treatise.

Jens Høyrup (Roskilde)

Keywords : Graßmann; comparative linguistics; phonetics

Classification :

*01A55 Mathematics in the 19th century

91F20 Linguistics